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AUTHOR Stennett, R. G.; Isaacs, Lorna
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ABSTRACT

The number and characteristics of ninth grade students who ran a high risk of not successfully completing their ninth grade program were investigated. With the assistance of the school guidance counselors data were collected with two forms, one which contained information from teachers about students identified as "high risk" in the eighth grade and one which identified those ninth grade students who had failed two or more subjects at mid-term or were taking remedial work. Results indicated that: (1) the "high risk" group contained proportionately more boys than girls; (2) students in the "high risk" group appeared to be only slightly less capable academically than students in general; and (3) many academic problems were related to school placement and/or course selection. (Author/HLM)

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THE ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY TRANSITION: A FOLLOW-UP OF 'HIGH RISK' STUDENTS

R. G. Stennett, Ph.D. & Lorna Isaacs

Research Report 79-03

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THE ELEMENTARY TO SECONDARY TRANSITION: A FOLLOW-UP OF 'HIGH RISK' STUDENTS

R. G. Stennett, Ph.D. & Lorna Isaacs
Educational Research Services

During the latter part of the 1977-78 academic year the Area Learning Resource Teachers systematically identified a number of grade 8 students likely to have difficulty in grade 9. These students were thought to be 'at risk' because, although of average or better academic ability, they had specific difficulties in one or more basic areas. The initial purpose of this study was simply to determine how well this group of students was managing academically in grade 9 by Christmas or the end of the first semester.

During discussions of this project with the secondary guidance counsellors it was agreed to extend the study to include *all* grade 9 students who were having difficulty at the end of the first semester. In total then this study represents a relatively modest attempt to determine the number and characteristics of all those grade 9 students who run a 'high risk' of not successfully completing their grade 9 program. The counsellors felt that, for many of these students, the basic problem was one of inappropriate course or program selection.

METHOD

Data Base. With the generous help of the secondary guidance counsellors two simple data gathering forms were developed and distributed to all schools. The counsellors took responsibility for completing both forms. The first form required assembling data on those students identified in grade 8 by the Area Learning Resource Teachers. Completion of the second

form required the counsellors to identify in advance from school records "....all grade 9 students who failed two or more subjects at Christmas (one of which was either English or Mathematics) or who were taking a remedial level (phase 2) course in either of those two subjects." In semestered schools a student was included if he failed one or more subjects and met the remaining criteria.

In addition to this information, MECA was able to provide a computer tape containing grade 9 Christmas mark data for several schools that use the computerized mark-reporting system. This file allowed us to produce some 'reference' data against which the performance of the 'high risk' students could be evaluated.

The counsellors in Thames and Ross were asked to provide similar information on any student who had entered their schools from another 'non-vocational' school after the initial September registration.

Sub-groups. The data to be presented in this report, therefore, pertain to three groups of students: (1) the students identified in grade 8 as being 'at risk'; (2) the students identified in grade 9, in terms of their Christmas marks, as being 'high risk', and (3) all grade 9 students in those non-semestered schools using the computer mark-reporting system.

When a student was included in both groups 1 and 2 he was considered, for data analysis, to be in group 1. The reader should note that the data reported for group 3 include some of the data for groups 1 and 2. For ease of reference, group 1 is referred to as 'grade 8 high risk', group 2 as 'grade 9 high risk' and group 3 as 'reference schools'.

Study Limitations. This study is limited in several important respects: (a) information could not be developed on all variables for all

groups, (b) the data are limited primarily to the 'academic' area, (c) no data relevant to students' elementary progress were gathered and (d) the records reviewed did not regularly provide some of the key information that was sought. The results of this study, therefore, should be viewed as tentative.

RESULTS

For ease and economy of presentation the results will be presented largely in tabular form with comments in the text to highlight specific findings. Findings on variables for which information is available for all three groups will be presented first, followed by data available for only the grade 8 or grade 9 groups of students.

The sex and IQ distributions of students, by group, are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. Typical of findings from other studies (Stennett, 1966) the 'high risk' groups contain proportionately more boys... roughly 3 boys for every 2 girls. Students in the 'high risk' groups appear to be only slightly less capable academically than students in general. Thus, while limited ability may be a major factor producing 'risk' for some students it is obviously not a factor for most of them.

About 75% of the grade 8 group and 46% of the grade 9 group were taking primarily phase 4 courses. About 3-4% of each had either dropped out of school or could not be located.

Table 3 gives a distribution of students in terms of the number of courses taken and the number for which failing grades were obtained at the end of the first term or semester. In the grade 8 group about half failed one or more subjects.

Mathematics. Table 4 gives distributions of students' Christmas marks, separately for those enrolled in phase 2, 4 or 5 courses. It is clear from these data that: (a) the higher the phase the higher the failure rate and (b) with the exception of students taking phase 5 courses, the performance of the grade 8 group is not markedly different from that of students in general.

English. Table 5 provides similar distributions for students' Christmas marks in the area of English. The trends evident for mathematics also hold for English.

Table 6 provides distributions of students by average Christmas mark, separately for each group. Sixteen percent of the grade 8 group and 45% of the grade 9 group had an average mark at Christmas of 50 or less, compared to 6% for students in general.

It is clear from the foregoing that, while about half of the grade 8 'high risk' group are succeeding reasonably, the remainder are having significant difficulty. It is also readily apparent that only a small proportion of all students who have difficulty in grade 9 were identified at grade 8. Overall, it appears that 10-15% of all grade 9 students are having significant difficulty achieving the academic goals they have set for themselves. These figures represent only a slight change from the situation as it existed in 1964-65 (Stennett, 1966).

Grade 8 'High Risk' Group. The following additional facts were developed on the grade 8 'high risk' group. About 23% had received some kind of special service at secondary school, primarily from the guidance departments and school psychologists. Some 17% had been involved in discipline problems. Most students (70%) had only one primary area of difficulty--usually English or mathematics.

Grade 9 'High Risk' Group. About 30% of this group of students had repeated one or more elementary grades. Most (71%) entered secondary school from a London elementary school and most (93%) were in the regular elementary program. Six percent entered from an Intermediate 7/8 program and 1% from Senior Opportunity classes.

Although 40 (10%) of these students were either required or encouraged to take summer school only 24 actually attended. Of those attending 83% were successful.

Enrolment in either Thames or Ross was apparently recommended to only 15 or 4% of these students. However, following initial enrolment in a 'regular' secondary school, 39 or 10% of these grade 9 'high risk' students subsequently transferred to either Thames or Ross. Of these, almost one third had left school by Christmas.

DISCUSSION

Despite the limited nature of the data developed for this study, some general trends are apparent. First, while a significant number of the students identified as 'high risk' in grade 8 are having real problems in grade 9, many seem to be managing reasonably well. Second, there are three or four times as many students who have serious difficulty in grade 9 than were identified in grade 8. Third, the total number of students experiencing difficulty in grade 9 is high (10-20%) and does not appear to have changed dramatically over the past decade. Finally, the data of this study tend to support the guidance counsellors' assertion that many of the academic problems students encounter are related to school placement and/or course selection. This is, of course, not a new problem (Stennett &

Feenstra, 1966). It appears, for example, that there may be as many as 100 to 150 students attending 'regular' secondary schools who, in terms of their skills and abilities, would be more appropriate candidates for the vocational schools.

SUMMARY

The end-of-first-term academic performance of two groups of students identified at either grade 8 or grade 9 as likely to have difficulty successfully completing their grade 9 program was reviewed and contrasted with the performance of all grade 9 students from four secondary schools. The following tentative conclusions were drawn from this study: (a) about 50% of the 'high risk' students identified at grade 8 are experiencing significant difficulty in grade 9, (b) of all students having difficulty in grade 9, only about one quarter were identified in grade 8, (c) the overall number of students likely to fail in grade 9, 10 to 20%, is high and has not changed appreciably in the past decade and (d) inappropriate program and course selection appears to be a major factor underlying the failing academic performance of many high risk students.

REFERENCES

Stennett, R. G. *Survey of Grade Repetitions During the 1964-65 School Year.* Board of Education, London, 1966. (mimeo)

Stennett, R. G. & Feenstra, H. J. *Four-year or Five-Year?* Board of Education, London, 1966. (mimeo)

TABLE 1 Distribution of Students by Sex, Separately for Students in the Grade 8 and 9 'High Risk' Groups and Students in the Reference Schools

	Identified at Grade....				Total		Reference Schools	
	8		9					
Sex	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	91	62	244	62	335	62	402	46
Female	56	38	153	38	209	38	481	54
Total	147	100	397	100	544	100	883	100

TABLE 2 Distribution of Students by IQ Score and Group

	Identified at Grade....				Total	
	8		9			
I.Q.	N	%	N	%	N	%
0 - 60	1	1			1	
61 - 70						
71 - 80	2	1	5	2	7	2
81 - 90	18	13	41	19	59	16
91 - 100	53	37	74	34	127	35
101 - 110	44	31	74	34	118	33
111 - 120	18	13	18	8	36	10
121 +	7	5	4	2	11	3
Average	101		99		99	

TABLE 3 Distribution of Students by Number of Courses Taken and Number of Courses Failed at Christmas

	Identified at Grade.....					
	8		9		Total	
Courses	Taken	Failed	Taken	Failed	Taken	Failed
1		30		6		36
2		14		36		50
3	5	8	1	21	6	29
4	39	10	13	16	52	26
5		2		6		8
6	7	2	1	4	8	6
7	7	1		2	7	3
8	71		79	1	150	1
Average	6.43	2.25	7.37	3.05	6.83	2.71

TABLE 4 Distributions of Students' Christmas Mathematics Marks by Phase and Group

PHASE	Christmas Mark	Identified at Grade..... 8		9		Total		Reference Schools	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
PHASE 2	0 - 50	0		21	28	21	23	2	6
	51 - 60	2	14	13	17	15	17	4	12
	61 - 70	4	29	15	20	19	21	10	29
	71+	8	57	27	35	35	39	18	53
	Average	73		61		63		72	
PHASE 4	0 - 50	14	23	73	76	87	55	18	25
	51 - 60	14	23	5	5	19	12	14	19
	61 - 70	18	29	11	11	29	18	20	28
	71+	16	26	7	7	23	15	20	28
	Average	61		44		50		61	
PHASE 5	0 - 50	10	43	92	84	102	77	68	17
	51 - 60	5	22	10	9	15	11	62	15
	61 - 70	5	22	6	6	11	8	81	20
	71+	3	13	1	1	4	3	197	48
	Average	50		43		44		68	

TABLE 5 Distributions of Students' Christmas English Marks by Phase and Group

PHASE	Christmas Mark	Identified at Grade..... 8 N	8 %	9 N	9 %	Total N	Total %	Reference Schools N	Reference Schools %
PHASE 2	0 - 50			14	41	14	40		
	51 - 60			7	21	7	20		
	61 - 70	1	100	6	17	7	20		
	71+			7	21	7	20		
	Average	63		51		52			
PHASE 4	0 - 50	17	23	80	72	97	53	8	25
	51 - 60	19	26	13	12	32	17	6	19
	61 - 70	24	33	15	14	39	21	2	6
	71+	13	18	3	2	16	9	16	50
	Average	58		45		51		62	
PHASE 5	0 - 50	7	27	55	58	62	51	41	10
	51 - 60	14	54	27	28	41	34	89	22
	61 - 70	4	15	13	14	17	14	115	28
	71+	1	4	0		1	1	163	40
	Average	54		48		50		67	

TABLE 6 Distribution of Students' Average Christmas Marks by Group

Christmas Marks	Identified at Grade.....				Total		Reference Schools	
	8		9					
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0 - 50	20	16	162	45	182	37	43	6
51 - 60	45	36	159	44	204	42	149	21
61 - 70	55	44	39	11	94	19	244	34
71+	5	4	4	1	9	2	280	39
Average	58		50		52		67	